DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 912 HE 030 086

AUTHOR Bolender, Ronald
TITLE The Evaluation of Institutional Goals for Freshman Seminar at Mount Vernon Nazarene College.
PUB DATE Jan 94
NOTE 51p.; Practicum Report, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; Church Related Colleges; *College Freshmen; Educational Objectives; *Grade Point Average; Higher Education; Organizational Objectives; *School Holding Power; *Seminars; *Study Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Freshman Seminars; *Mount Vernon Nazarene College OH

ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the stated and real goals of the freshman seminar course at Mount Vernon Nazarene College in Mount Vernon, Ohio. The stated goals for the course, as presented to parents and prospective students, were the enhancement of study skills, strategies for improving grades, and students' overall survival of the college experience, while the real institutional goals were to increase students' grade point averages (GPAs) and improve the retention rate. Information on GPAs and retention were collected on 254 first time freshmen enrolled in the 1990 fall semester, including 122 students who successfully completed the freshman seminar and 132 who did not enroll in or who did not complete the seminar course. It was found that there were no significant differences in the first- through fourth-semester GPAs of the students who completed or who did not complete the freshman seminar. Nor were there significant differences in the retention rates between the two groups. The results of the study raise questions as to the necessity or usefulness of the freshman seminar at Mount Vernon Nazarene College. (Contains 40 references.) (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

HE

THE EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL GOALS FOR FRESHMAN SEMINAR AT MOUNT VERNON NAZARENE COLLEGE

ED 406 912

Governance and Management

Ronald Bolender

Mount Vernon Nazarene College

A Practicum Report presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Nova University

January, 1994

HE 030 086

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
RONALD BOLENDER
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

Abstract of a Practicum Report presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

THE EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL GOALS FOR FRESHMAN SEMINAR AT MOUNT VERNON NAZARENE COLLEGE

by

Ronald Bolender

January, 1994

Both stated and real institutional goals for the freshman seminar course at Mount Vernon Nazarene College (MVNC) were evaluated. Two research questions were asked and answered in evaluating these goals. The first research question was: Are cumulative college GPAs of students completing the freshman seminar course higher than the GPAs of students who do not? The second question was: Is the retention rate higher for the group of freshmen who complete the freshman seminar course as compared with the group who do not? Students were subgrouped according to their final cumulative

high school grade point average. The data for the first and second research questions were shown to not be significant. However, further studies were recommended. One recommended study was to compare MVNC's freshman seminar course design and instructional methods with other freshman seminar courses cited (in the literature) as being effective in regards to the research questions listed in this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES 6

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION 7

Background and Significance 7

Research Questions 10

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 12

Evaluation of Programs 12

Stated and Real Institutional Goals .. 14

Intangibles and Promotion 18

College GPA and Retention Rate Enhancement..... 19

Freshman Seminar Effectiveness 21

The Academically Talented Student 26

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES 28

Methodology 28

Procedures 28

Definition of Terms 33

Assumptions 34

Limitations 36

4. RESULTS 37

Page

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 42

Discussion 42

Conclusions 43

Implications 44

Recommendations for the Improvement of Practice 44

REFERENCES 46

LIST OF TABLES

Table — Page

1. Experimental and Control Subjects Categorized by High School GPA Subgroups 39
2. First and Fourth Semester Cumulative GPAs 40
3. Second and Fourth Semester Retention Rates 41

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

Mount Vernon Nazarene College (MVNC) is a church related coeducational college of arts and sciences that is sponsored and supported by the East Central Educational Region of the Church of the Nazarene including: (a) Ohio; (b) eastern Kentucky; and (c) West Virginia. It has a student body of over twelve hundred and is located in a small rural county in central Ohio. At least one third of the student body come from families where parents are not college educated and at least forty percent of the student body come from a rural or Appalachian county.

Freshman seminar (an elective course) is introduced to parents and incoming students with a presentation of stated institutional goals for the course: (a) enhancement of study skills and strategies for improving grades and (b) assistance with student's overall survival of the college experience. The real institutional goals (the basis for the development of the freshman seminar course) are: (a) to increase the possibility of improving the student's college grade

point average (GPA) and (b) to improve the retention rate. The stated and real institutional goals are similar. The stated institutional goals were developed to present a positive promotion to incoming students and their parents. From a public relations standpoint, MVNC did not want to say that the freshman seminar course was developed in order to better deal with the problems of poor academic performance and poor retention rates.

The stated institutional goals are presented to incoming students and their parents during summer pre-registration sessions to encourage voluntary enrollment in the freshman seminar course; however, the enrollment services division has received a few complaints from parents and students stating that the freshman seminar experience does not match the promotion they receive at summer orientation therefore they do not see the value of the course. The enrollment services division is not as concerned about the perceived expectations formed by the promotion (although the promotion may need to be altered) as it is about the issue the complaints have raised. Is the freshman seminar course making a positive contribution

toward the fulfillment of the real institutional goals? If a positive contribution is not being made, then the integrity of the promotion is in question.

MVNC is in the midst of a general education core review. Proposals regarding the treatment of freshman seminar range from making it a requirement for all first time freshmen to classifying it as an optional remedial course that would not count toward graduation credit. The proposals have been based on faculty opinion without a formal evaluation of the results (college GPAs and retention rates) of students who have completed the course. The real institutional goals of the freshman seminar course at MVNC have not been formally evaluated until this study.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the real institutional goals (increasing the possibility of improving college GPA and improvement of retention rate) for students completing the freshman seminar course. This was accomplished by comparing the outcomes (cumulative college grade point average (GPA) and retention rate) among students who enrolled in and successfully completed the freshman seminar course during the fall semester of their freshmen year with

students who did not complete the course. Since MVNC offers two year degrees and pre-professional programs that conclude by the end of the fourth semester, the fourth semester was the focus of the study.

This study directly related to the Governance and Management seminar; more specifically to the sections that discussed linking promotion to product in connection with the fulfillment of institutional goals. Contemporary theories and practices of enrollment management were reviewed as they related to retention.

Research Questions

Two research questions were developed with regard to the real institutional goals to be fulfilled by implementing the freshman seminar course. The first research question was: Are cumulative college GPAs of students completing the freshman seminar course higher than the GPAs of students who do not? The second research question was: Is the retention rate higher for the group of freshmen who complete the freshman seminar course as compared with the group who do not?

In order to determine the answer to these questions, two null hypotheses were developed. The first null hypothesis was: There will not be a

significant difference in the cumulative college GPA of students completing the freshman seminar course as compared with those who did not. The second null hypothesis was: There will not be a significant difference in the retention rate for students completing the freshman seminar course as compared with those who did not.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many sources were reviewed from literature related to institutional goals and freshman seminar courses. Primary sources for institutional goals were textbooks and recommended reading books listed in the study guides for the Governance and Management and Research Methodology seminars (Gadbow, Groff, Mulder, Peinovich, & Quinlan, 1992; Rankin, 1991). Primary sources for freshman seminar courses were from appropriate ERIC documents and journals identified by computer search using these descriptors: (a) school orientation; (b) seminars; (c) institutional goals; (d) college freshmen; (e) school holding power; and (f) study skills.

Evaluation of Programs

Organizations often provide for some form of evaluation (formally and informally) of programs. Many of these evaluations do not systematically collect and organize facts in a manner that allows for significant interpretation (Cronbach, Ambron, Dornbusch, Hess, Hornik, Phillips, Walker, & Weiner, 1980). Abrahamson and Hossler (1990) state that if a program is not

properly evaluated at regular intervals, the repeated promotion or implementation of that program may not be made on a sound basis. While many programs are not evaluated at all, some evaluations are conducted in a manner not as to obtain information but to allow organizations to make a claim that evaluations are being conducted. Bolman and Deal (1984) state that organizations often conduct program evaluations that are really just symbolic gestures and not an honest attempt to make significant interpretations. The purpose behind this type of evaluations is to allow the organization to legitimately claim to its stakeholders that evaluations are conducted. Results are not seriously considered nor are they reviewed by very many stakeholders.

In regard to a freshman seminar course, Titley (1985) states, "Whether an orientation program has achieved its goals can only be determined by systematic evaluation" (p. 231). The goals for the freshman seminar course must be: (a) clearly defined; (b) continually accomplished; and (c) documented so that the benefits of this program can be clearly communicated to the stakeholders (Jewler, 1989).

Stated and Real Institutional Goals

Stated goals are presented to all stakeholders and often to the general public as well. These are intended to be fulfilled. Real goals are those stated by management to a select few and generally receive greater priority and resource allocation (Etzioni, 1964). Stated institutional goals for the freshman seminar course (at MVNC) as presented to parents and prospective students were: (a) enhancement of study skills and strategies for improving grades and (b) assistance with student's overall survival of the college experience. The real institutional goals for freshman seminar course (at MVNC) were: (a) to increase the possibility of improving the student's cumulative college GPA and (b) improve the retention rate. Resources are focused primarily on improving GPAs and retention rates. It is the intent of management that freshman seminar course will fulfill the stated institutional goals, however this program was implemented for the most part to improve GPA and retention statistics.

The stated institutional goals for a freshman seminar course can be tied to the general institutional

goals of a college. Robinson (1990) found that a freshman seminar course could be developed which would comply with the purpose statement of Brenau College. Purpose statement goals of Brenau College that related to the freshman seminar course were to help students learn how to: (a) organize and communicate thoughts; (b) think critically and creatively; and (c) develop academic and professional competency through the liberal arts experience.

MVNC has a similar relationship between student learning goals (listed under general institutional goals) and the freshman seminar course description. The course description states, "Special emphasis is given to essential skills for succeeding in the college environment, (Mount Vernon Nazarene College [MVNC], 1992, p. 217). (This catalog was used since the earlier catalog (Mount Vernon Nazarene College [MVNC], 1990a) had accidentally omitted the course description for the freshman seminar course.)

Timpe (1990) developed a syllabus for the freshman seminar course at MVNC. This syllabus was used in Timpe's section as well as in all other sections of the freshman seminar course taught during the Fall 1990

semester (Bolender, 1990; Cronk, 1990; Severns, 1990). The syllabus for freshman seminar listed the student learning goals and tied the course to the general student learning goals listed in the catalog. MVNC (1990a) states the following cognitive and social goals:

> Specifically, the College will endeavor to provide opportunity for the student to: Continue to develop the ability to listen receptively, think critically, reason clearly, evaluate objectively, and communicate cogently and clearly; Acquire a knowledge and appreciation of the humanities, the social and natural sciences, the Bible, and other religious literature for personal enrichment and professional competency; Analyze, synthesize and integrate various types of information and structures of knowledge, including the causal relationships of events and the logical relationship of ideas... Develop the social, ethical and professional skills necessary to function competently in one's service-ministry to others; Continue to

> develop and maintain meaningful, rewarding relationships with individuals including those in the wider social context; Grow with others in community: with neighbors, with fellow citizens, and with members of the Church, the body of Christ (pp. 18-19).

The promotional brochure for the freshman seminar course (Mount Vernon Nazarene College [MVNC], 1990b) states that the goals for the course were to provide opportunities for enhanced academic performance and general survival skills for first time freshmen. The stated goals for the freshman seminar course listed in the promotional brochure and course syllabi were tied into the general institutional goals (cognitive and social) of MVNC.

The stated institutional goals of freshman seminar as promoted were tied to the: (a) general institutional goals; (b) course syllabi; and (c) promotional brochure. The real institutional goals for the freshman seminar course were not printed, but were the basis for the implementation of the course. These goals were the primary ones discussed during the

development of the concept of the freshman seminar course by a committee comprised of faculty members.

Intangibles and Promotion

Intangibles (such as the stated goals for MVNC's freshman seminar course) have to be symbolically promoted. At MVNC, possible outcomes and purported myths connected with the freshman seminar course include helping a student to: (a) develop into a scholar; (b) adjust to campus social life; and (c) bring into focus a life direction. "From a symbolic perspective, organizations are judged not so much by what they do as by how they appear" (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 173). Levitt (1986) talks about the promotion of intangibles. Most intangibles (such as the results of the freshman seminar course) are not testable prior to purchase. Therefore in promoting the freshman seminar course to parents and prospective students at MVNC, myths may be shared and possibilities of outcomes may be illustrated. Stated institutional goals are promoted as achievable expectations upon successful completion of the freshman seminar course. Parents and prospective students hopefully develop a perception of MVNC as an institution proactively helping students

successfully complete college through the offering of the freshman seminar course.

College GPA and Retention Rate Enhancement

The real institutional goals to be fulfilled by the freshman seminar course at MVNC are related to enhancing the cumulative college GPA and improving the retention rates of incoming freshmen. Literature related to the freshman seminar course addresses these two issues.

Some faculty at various institutions have the viewpoint that higher education is only for the intellectually elite and an attempt should be made to fail the weak and unmotivated students early in their college undergraduate experience (Hossler & Bean, 1990). This view is not congruent with the freshman seminar philosophy. Tinto (1987) states that: (a) colleges should offer opportunities for freshmen to attain skills needed for academic success; (b) retention actions should be systematic; and (c) retention activities should begin as early as possible in the freshman year. Front loading efforts (such as the freshman seminar course) are sound investments of scarce retention resources (Tinto, 1990). The first

year of college shapes overall retention rates. Tinto (1990) states, "Efforts to reshape that experience invariably will have the largest return in both retention and learning" (p. 44). Colleges should ensure that newly enrolled freshmen have the opportunity to attain needed academic skills as quickly as possible. This need requires immediate action during the first semester (Boivin, Beuthin, & Hauger, 1993).

Typically, college GPAs are lower than high school GPAs (Astin, 1993). This would be somewhat acceptable as long as students are able to achieve their academic goals (such as remaining in college long enough to earn a degree). Levitz and Noel (1989) state, "Too often we forget that students come to us with uninformed expectations about college learning and college life . . ." (p. 68). If colleges do not help freshmen develop a realistic expectation of college learning at an early point in their college experience, then lower academic performance or attrition will result. Institutions have an obligation to students to ensure a successful freshman year (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). An institution should focus on helping students meet their

educational goals, even if the problems relate to a student's own personal shortcomings (Bean, 1990b).

Freshman Seminar Effectiveness

Freshman seminar courses vary according to: (a) institutional purpose; (b) type of academic credit awarded; and (c) type of instruction. Barefoot and Fidler (1992) conducted a national survey of freshman seminar programs in 1991. Four different types of freshman seminar programs were identified: (a) extended orientation; (b) common academic; (c) various academic; and (d) basic study skills. Each institution was categorized under one of the four types and the top eight goals for each type were listed. The number one reason among all four types of institutions for implementing a freshman seminar program was to assist with the students' development of academic skills. Retention goals listed for each of the four types were related to academic success and helping the student feel connected to the institution.

With regard to the fulfillment of these goals, Titley (1985) states that research indicates early orientation activities are worthy of an institution's scarce retention resources. Activities (such as the

freshman seminar course) enable students to enhance their academic abilities and general survival techniques. She further states, "It would be very difficult to argue that the orientation course approach is not the most effective overall for students" (Titley, 1985, p. 228). Research results indicate that students receive enhanced benefits when an orientation program evolves into a full semester freshman seminar course (Cuseo, 1991).

One freshman seminar model that works with these goals is the success/survival/orientation model. This model is designed to make an attempt at enhancing retention rates through: (a) the development of general college survival skills and (b) improved academic skills leading to enhanced academic success (Murphy, 1989). Murphy (1989) states that the freshman seminar course will be a part of institutions for a long time to come. It is the point at which institutions deal with the developmental needs of students and the organization's overall retention strategy. This model is similar to the one used at MVNC.

Research of this model and other models of freshman seminar courses indicate effective results in academic and retention goals can be reached. Fidler and Hunter (1989) state that the freshman seminar course has not been identified as the cause of increased retention rates and improved academic performance, but it has been shown to have a positive relationship with these two outcomes. This statement was based on research conducted at the University of South Carolina in the University 101 freshman seminar course as well as the review of several other freshman seminar course outcome studies conducted at other institutions. Gordon (1989) states that the positive outcome of the freshman seminar course on adjustment and retention cannot be disputed. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) state the following:

> Do freshman seminars really work? Do freshmen who enroll in such seminars, compared to other students, know more about the institution, use student support services, get more involved in the life of the campus, earn higher grades, and most important, persist at a higher rate? The

answer is a resounding yes to all those questions . . ." (p. 181).

In a study of the effectiveness of fulfilling academic and retention goals, Jones (1984) found that a structured freshman seminar course at Phillips County Community College was a significant factor in increasing academic performance and retention rates. He compared students in a single freshman class. One group voluntarily enrolled in and successfully completed the freshman seminar course and the other group did not.

In another effectiveness investigation, Wilkie and Kuckuck (1989) conducted a study of high risk students who successfully completed the freshman seminar course. Participants in the experimental and control groups did not voluntarily participate. Only high risk students were involved in the study. During the 1984 fall semester, high risk students were either required to enroll or not enroll in the freshman seminar course. Their progress was followed for three years. Over a three year period, the required freshman seminar course indicated a positive relationship to better cumulative GPAs and retention rates. A majority of the freshman

seminar participants were first generation college students.

Fidler (1991) conducted research on the sophomore return (retention) rate of participants in freshman seminar versus non participants of the freshman seminar course from 1973 through 1988. This study took place at the University of South Carolina. The course was a voluntary elective course where participants were self selected. Research indicated that a positive relationship existed between successful completion of the freshman seminar course and the sophomore return (retention) rate. In fourteen of the sixteen years of this study, participants had lower predicted GPAs than non participants (based on pre-admission records), yet the participants had higher retention rates.

As in the Fidler (1991) study, MVNC had a voluntary enrollment policy for the freshman seminar course during the Fall 1990 semester. It is possible that the voluntary enrollment could have influenced the outcome of Fidler's study and this study conducted at MVNC. Strumpf and Hunt (1993) conducted a study to account for the volunteer effect. This study was conducted at the University of Maryland at College Park with

freshman entering college during the Fall 1986 semester. An interest survey regarding enrollment in the freshman seminar course was first conducted. Two hundred and forty indicated interest in voluntary enrollment. Volunteers were randomly assigned into two groups. The first group enrolled in the freshman seminar course. The second group was not allowed to enroll. The study was conducted for four semesters. The group allowed to enroll experienced better retention rates and better academic standing than the group not allowed to enroll. This held true for all four semesters. This study indicated that the freshman seminar course is successful for increasing retention rates while controlling for the volunteer effect.

The Academically Talented Student

Some faculty hold the view that the freshman seminar course is only beneficial for the at risk student. Fidler and Hunter (1989) state that the freshman seminar course not only benefits the at risk student but the academic talented student as well. Davis (1992) studied the retention rates and academic performance of high SAT and low SAT students at Kennesaw State College for two years. Results of the

study indicated that the stereotypical response that the freshman seminar course is not beneficial for the academically talented student is invalid. A positive relationship exists between successfully completing the freshman seminar course and improved academic performance and retention rates for the academically talented student.

The review of the literature illustrates that the real institutional goals for which the freshman year seminar course was designed to fulfill can be evaluated. The evaluation of the outcomes (cumulative college GPAs and retention rates) will indicate the effectiveness of the freshman seminar course as a program to meet the real institutional goals. There is a body of research (as cited) supporting the design of this study.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Methodology

The evaluation method was used along with the quasi-experimental (ex post facto) design to indicate whether real institutional goals (cumulative college GPAs and retention rates) were positively achieved for students who successfully completed the freshman seminar course as compared with students who did not. Inferential statistics were applied to the sample of 1990 fall semester first time freshmen. The accomplishment of mission (goals) through product delivery is the focus of the evaluation method (Isaac & Michael, 1981). Often the purpose of an evaluation study is to determine whether an aspect of the educational institution is performing as it should (Robinson & Woolf, 1991).

Procedures

A general review of literature related to the research questions was completed. More specifically a review of literature regarding the need for regular evaluations of institutional programs to assess fulfillment of stated and real institutional goals was

made. Second, a review of literature was made in regard to the relationship between the freshman seminar course and two outcomes: (a) cumulative college GPAs and (b) retention rates.

Next a list of all first time freshman who entered MVNC during the 1990 fall semester was obtained from the office of records and registration along with a list of all first time freshmen who successfully completed the freshman seminar course during that semester. First time freshmen who successfully completed the freshman seminar course during the 1990 fall semester were identified and assigned to the experimental group. The remaining first time freshmen were assigned to the control group. The 1990 fall semester was chosen for three reasons: (a) the freshman seminar course was strongly promoted during the 1990 summer pre-registration sessions; (b) there was a sizable number of students enrolled in the freshman seminar course; and (c) retention rates could be compared for two complete academic years (1990-1991 and 1991-1992).

MVNC academic transcripts and final cumulative high school GPAs were obtained from the office of records

and registration for each student who was a first time freshman during the 1990 fall semester. MVNC academic transcripts contained details of the first through fourth semesters and served as the source for computing and comparing cumulative GPAs and retention rates. Final high school cumulative GPAs were used to compare the outcomes of subgroups of first time college freshmen with similar high school academic performance. Both the experimental and control groups were subdivided according to ranges of final cumulative high school GPAs. Subgroup ranges of final cumulative high school GPAs were: (a) 3.6 through 4.0 (range for the letter grade of A); (b) 2.6 through 3.59 (range for the letter grade of B); (c) 2.0 through 2.59 (high to middle range for the letter grade of C); and (d) less than 2.0 (this range is unacceptable for graduation from MVNC).

First time freshmen for the 1990 fall semester were selected as the sample to test the null hypotheses. The population (from which the sample was taken) is all first time freshmen who have entered MVNC over the years and have either completed or not completed the freshman seminar course listed in this study.

Inferential statistics (the two tailed independent samples t test; significance level $\alpha = .05/2$) was applied to this sample as a basis for comparing the experimental and control groups for each null hypothesis (and each subgroup of the null hypotheses). This significance level was selected for two reasons: (a) most of the studies of freshman seminar courses cited used this as an acceptable level and (b) in the social sciences, this is often used as an acceptable level to avoid Type I and Type II errors (Isaac & Michael, 1981).

The first null hypothesis was tested by comparing the cumulative college GPAs of the experimental and control groups. The entire sample and each subgroup were compared for both the end of the first and fourth semesters.

The second null hypothesis was tested by comparing the retention rates of the experimental and control groups. The entire sample and each subgroup were compared both the beginning of the second semester and the end of the fourth semester. In this case the second semester rather than the first semester was used in order to measure the retention rate from the first

to the second semester. The retention rate at the end of the first semester was not a desired measurement for this study.

After the null hypotheses were tested, the next procedure was to evaluate the two research questions. The first research question was: Are cumulative college GPAs of students completing the freshman seminar course higher than the GPAs of students who do not? This research question was related to the real institutional goal for the freshman seminar course which states that freshman seminar enhances the possibility of improving a student's college GPA. This real institutional goal was closely related to the stated institutional goal of enhancing study skills and coming up with strategies for improving grades. The second research question was: Is the retention rate higher for the group of freshmen who complete the freshman seminar course as compared with the group who do not? This research question was related to the real institutional goal for the freshman seminar course which states that it would improve the retention rate. This real institutional goal was closely related to at least part of the stated institutional goal of

assisting with the student's overall survival of the college experience.

Definition of Terms

The term stakeholder is used in the governance and management literature of higher education. "Any person with a vested interest in the performance of an institution or in a particular institutional process is a stakeholder" (Bean, 1990a, p. 26). This could include: (a) students; (b) employees; (c) trustees; (d) alumni; (e) parents of students and alumni; (f) general population surrounding the physical campus; and (g) (in MVNC's case) pastors and members of supporting churches.

The freshman seminar course met for one hour per week in a classroom and was conducted in the standard lecture format. A textbook (Walter & Siebert, 1990) designed to cover the following topics was used: (a) study skills; (b) time management; (c) personal and group orientation exercises; (d) relationship management; (e) physical wellness; and (f) financial management. The course attempted to orient the student toward awareness of campus resources (such as the library and career/counseling services). A letter

grade was issued and one hour of college credit was applied toward meeting general elective graduation requirements.

Retention rate was a measurement of the average number of semesters completed per student. The scale was based on a minimum of 0 (zero semesters completed) through a maximum of 4 (four semesters completed). Only regular semesters were measured (1990 fall semester, 1991 spring semester, 1991 fall semester, and 1992 spring semester). The January mini-term and summer sessions were not included in the measurement. A completed semester was defined as enrollment from the first day of class through final exams. It did not mean the successful completion of earned credit hours for graduation.

Assumptions

This study made an assumption that all first time freshmen who entered MVNC during the 1990 fall semester planned to remain at MVNC through the end of the fourth semester. It assumed that all students had at least one of the following educational goals requiring attendance (at MVNC) for at least four semesters: (a)

earn a bachelors degree; (b) earn an associate degree; or (c) complete a pre-professional program.

An assumption was made that the sample of first time freshmen enrolled at MVNC during the 1990 fall semester represented the general population of all first time freshmen entering MVNC over the years. It was assumed that the results of this evaluation could be replicated for samples of first time freshmen who entered during other fall semesters (such as 1991 and 1992 fall semesters).

This study assumes there is a causal relationship between the successful completion of the freshman seminar course and outcomes (cumulative college GPAs and retention rates). This relationship may not exist.

This study makes the assumption that outcomes (cumulative college GPAs and retention rates) are proper dependent variables for determining the effectiveness of the freshman seminar course on first time freshmen. Other dependent variables may be more effective for measuring the effect of the treatment on the independent variable.

Limitations

The results of this study may not be replicable in another setting or for another freshman seminar course. The results cannot be generalized to the whole population of first time freshmen at all colleges and universities. There are too many variables to control for in applying this type of study from institution to institution. Some variables difficult to control are: (a) variations in teaching methods; (b) length of class session for freshman seminar courses; (c) varying admissions criteria for general student body; and (d) elective versus general requirement status of the course.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The data was collected and 254 first time freshmen were identified as entering MVNC during the 1990 fall semester (see Table 1). Of this group, 122 enrolled in and successfully completed the freshman seminar course during the 1990 fall semester (experimental group). There were 132 first time freshmen who either did not enroll in or did not successfully complete the freshman seminar course (control group).

The first and second null hypotheses were tested using the two-tailed independent samples t test (significance level $\alpha = .05/2$). The tests were conducted using SPSS for Windows Release 5.0, (1992).

The first null hypothesis tested was: There will not be a significant difference in the cumulative college GPA of students completing the freshman seminar course as compared with those who did not. See Table 2 for the results of the two-tailed independent t tests. All tests failed to reject the first null hypothesis: (a) first semester cumulative college GPAs for all cases; (b) first semester cumulative college GPAs for all subgroups (based on final cumulative high school

GPAs); (c) fourth semester cumulative college GPAs for all cases; and (d) fourth semester cumulative college GPAs for all subgroups (based on final cumulative high school GPAs). The possibility of a Type II error existed for all tests conducted for the first null hypothesis.

The second null hypothesis to be tested was: There will not be a significant difference in the retention rate for students completing the freshman seminar course as compared with those who did not. See Table 3 for the results of the two-tailed independent t tests. All tests failed to reject the second null hypothesis: (a) first to second semester retention rates for all cases; (b) first to second semester retention rates for all subgroups (based on final cumulative high school GPAs); (c) fourth semester retention rates for all cases; and (d) fourth semester retention rates for all subgroups (based on final cumulative high school GPAs). The possibility of a Type II error existed for all tests conducted for the second null hypothesis.

Table 1

Experimental and Control Subjects Categorized by High School GPA Subgroups

	Freshman Seminar Course	
Cumulative H. S. GPA	Experimental n	Control n
3.60 - 4.00	27	32
2.60 - 3.59	51	66
2.00 - 2.59	36	27
0.00 - 1.99	8	7
Group Total	122	132

Table 2

First and Fourth Semester Cumulative GPAs

Freshman Seminar Course				
Cumulative H. S. GPA	Experimental CGPA	Control CGPA	t-Value	Significance
First Semester				
3.60 - 4.00	3.452	3.497	.34	.735
2.60 - 3.59	2.839	2.669	-1.27	.206
2.00 - 2.59	2.125	2.055	- .35	.725
0.00 - 1.99	1.413	1.352	- .14	.890
All Cases	2.671	2.674	.03	.973
Fourth Semester				
3.60 - 4.00	3.422	3.525	.93	.356
2.60 - 3.59	2.850	2.706	-1.20	.231
2.00 - 2.59	2.134	2.098	- .20	.843
0.00 - 1.99	1.371	1.346	- .06	.951
All Cases	2.668	2.708	.37	.708

Table 3

Second and Fourth Semester Retention Rates

Freshman Seminar Course				
Cumulative H. S. GPA	Experimental Retention Rates	Control Retention Rates	t-Value	Significance
Second Semester				
3.60 - 4.00	.963	.969	.12	.905
2.60 - 3.59	.980	.970	- .36	.719
2.00 - 2.59	.917	.815	-1.20	.236
0.00 - 1.99	.750	.571	- .69	.500
All Cases	.943	.917	- .80	.423
Fourth Semester				
3.60 - 4.00	3.556	3.344	- .95	.348
2.60 - 3.59	3.549	3.394	- .95	.345
2.00 - 2.59	3.222	3.037	- .65	.520
0.00 - 1.99	2.500	2.143	- .52	.612
All Cases	3.385	3.242	-1.14	.256

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Titley (1985) states that an institution must systematically evaluate a freshman seminar course in light of its given goals. The lack of a systematic evaluation (conducted using the discipline of the scientific method) allows an institution to promote the benefits of a course when these benefits have not been tested. For this study, research questions were developed to evaluate the real institutional goals for which the freshman seminar course at MVNC was implemented to fulfill.

The first research question was: Are cumulative college GPAs of students completing the freshman seminar course higher than the GPAs of students who do not? The null hypothesis related to this research question was not rejected in the two-tailed independent samples t test. In this evaluation, the difference in cumulative college GPAs for those successfully completing the freshman seminar course was not shown to be significant as was cited in other studies (Jones,

1984; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Davis, 1992).

The evaluation of the second research question was similar to the first research question. The second research question was: Is the retention rate higher for the group of freshmen who complete the freshman seminar course as compared with the group who do not? The null hypothesis related to this research question was not rejected in the two-tailed independent samples t test. In this evaluation, the difference made by successfully completing the freshman seminar course was not shown to be significant as was cited in other studies (Jones, 1984; Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989; Fidler, 1991; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993; Davis, 1992).

Conclusions

The results reached in this evaluation do not allow MVNC to make the claim that the real and stated institutional goals are being fulfilled by the current design of the freshman seminar course. It is possible that a Type II error could have occurred as a result of a flaw in the design of this study. It is also possible that the wrong variables were tested to show

the positive benefits derived from the freshman seminar course.

Implications

The results of this evaluation indicate that prior to any further summer orientation promotions of the freshman seminar course to parents and prospective students, a decision should be made regarding the results of this study. The promotion cannot be conducted with confidence. Even if the study had Type II errors, it would be wise to redesign the promotion until further studies can be conducted.

The results of this study raise the question regarding the allocation of resources. For the immediate future, should MVNC continue to aggressively recruit students and assign faculty teaching loads for this course?

Recommendations for the Improvement of Practice

The stated and real institutional goals of the freshman seminar course need to be reviewed. There may be other variables that would more clearly indicate the effectiveness of the freshman seminar course for MVNC's first time freshmen.

The design and instruction of the freshman seminar course need to be examined. A review of course structure and teaching methods used in successful freshman seminar courses at other institutions as cited in this study should be done. Student evaluations of the freshman seminar course need to be examined as well.

The faculty at MVNC are currently reviewing the general education core. It has been recommended that the freshman seminar course become part of the required general education core for all first time freshmen. On the basis of the results of this formal evaluation, that decision should be postponed until further studies can be conducted. These studies should focus on the following: (a) instructional design; (b) teaching methods; and (c) relevancy of subject content as related to stated and real institutional goals.

REFERENCES

Abrahamson, T. D., & Hossler, D. (1990). Applying marketing strategies in student recruitment. In D. Hossler & J. P. Bean (Eds.), The Strategic Management of College Enrollments (pp. 100-118). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Astin, A. W. (1993). What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Barefoot, B. O., & Fidler, P. P. (1992). 1991 National Survey of Freshman Seminar Programming. (The Freshman Year Experience Monograph Series No. 10). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, The National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience.

Bean, J. P. (1990a). Strategic planning and enrollment management. In D. Hossler & J. P. Bean (Eds.), The Strategic Management of College Enrollments (pp. 21-43). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Bean, J. P. (1990b). Using retention research in enrollment management. In D. Hossler & J. P. Bean (Eds.), The Strategic Management of College Enrollments (pp. 170-185). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Boivin, M. J., Beuthin, T. M., & Hauger, G. (1993). Why Christian students leave Christian colleges: evaluating the dynamics of adjustment in a Christian community. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 5(1), 93-125.

Bolender, R. K. (1990). ITD101 Freshman Seminar Course Syllabus. Unpublished course syllabus, Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, OH.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1984). Modern Approaches to Understanding and Managing Organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Cronbach, L. J., Ambron, S. R., Dornbusch, S. M., Hess, R. D., Hornik, R. C., Phillips, D. C., Walker, D. F., & Weiner, S. S. (1980). Toward Reform of Program Evaluation: Aims, Methods, and Institutional Arrangements. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Cronk, R. L. (1990). ITD101 Freshman Seminar Course Syllabus. Unpublished course syllabus, Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, OH.

Cuseo, J. B. (1991). The Freshman Orientation Seminar: A Research-Based Rational for its Value, Delivery, and Content. (The Freshman Year Experience Monograph Series No. 4). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, The National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience.

Davis, B. O., Jr. (1992). Freshman seminar: a broad spectrum of effectiveness. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 4(1), 79-94.

Etzioni, A. (1964). Modern Organizations. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Fidler, P. P. (1991). Relationship of freshman orientation seminars to sophomore return rates. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 3(1), 7-38.

Fidler, P. P., & Hunter, M. S. (1989). How seminars enhance student success. In M. L. Upcraft & J. N. Gardner (Eds.), The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College (pp. 216-237). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Gadbow, N. F., Groff, W. E., Mulder, A. E., Peinovich, P. E., & Quinlan, T. H. (1992). Governance and Management. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Nova University, Abraham S. Fischler Center for the Advancement of Education: Programs for Higher Education.

Gordon, V. N. (1989). Origins and purposes of the freshman seminar. In M. L. Upcraft & J. N. Gardner

(Eds.), The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College (pp. 183-197). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Hossler, D., & Bean, J. P. (Eds.). (1990). The Strategic Management of College Enrollments. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Isaac, S., & Michael, W. B. (1981). Handbook in Research and Evaluation (2nd ed.). San Diego: EDITS Publishers.

Jewler, A. J. (1989). Elements of an effective seminar: the University 101 program. In M. L. Upcraft & J. N. Gardner (Eds.), The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College (pp. 198-215). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Jones, S. W. (1984). Evaluating the Impact of Freshmen Orientation on Student Persistence and Academic Performance. Phillips County, AR: Phillips County Community College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 241 089)

Levitt, T. (1986). The Marketing Imagination (2nd ed.). NY: The Free Press.

Levitz, R. S., & Noel, L. (1989). Connecting students to institutions: keys to retention and success. In M. L. Upcraft & J. N. Gardner (Eds.), The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College (pp. 65-81). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mount Vernon Nazarene College. (1990a). 1990-1992 Undergraduate Catalog. Mount Vernon, OH: Author.

Mount Vernon Nazarene College. (1990b). Freshman Seminar. Mount Vernon, OH: Author.

Mount Vernon Nazarene College. (1992). 1992-1994 Undergraduate Catalog. Mount Vernon, OH: Author.

Murphy, R. O. (1989). Freshman year enhancement in American higher education. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 1(2), 93-102.

Rankin, G. E. (1991). Research Methodology. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Nova University, Abraham S. Fischler Center for the Advancement of Education: Programs for Higher Education.

Robinson, P. W. (1990). Development of a Study Skills Curriculum as a Component of the ACT I Extended Freshman Orientation Experience at Brenau. Brenau, GA: Brenau College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 323 864)

Robinson, V., & Woolf, P. L. (1991). Guide to the Practicum Process (3rd ed.). Fort Lauderdale, FL: Nova University, Abraham S. Fischler Center for the Advancement of Education: Programs for Higher Education.

Severns, M. (1990). ITD101 Freshman Seminar Course Syllabus. Unpublished course syllabus, Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, OH.

SPSS for Windows Release 5.0 [Computer program]. (1992). Chicago: SPSS, Incorporated.

Strumpf, G., & Hunt, P. (1993). The effects of an orientation course on the retention and academic standing of entering freshmen, controlling for the volunteer effect. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 5(1), 7-14.

Timpe, R. L. (1990). ITD101 Freshman Seminar Course Syllabus. Unpublished course syllabus, Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, OH.

Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes of Student Attrition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1990). Principles of effective retention. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 2(1), 35-48.

Titley, B. S. (1985). Orientation programs. In L. Noel, R. S. Levitz, & D. Saluri (Eds.), Increasing Student Retention (pp. 221-243). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Upcraft, M. L., & Gardner, J. N. (Eds.). (1989). The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Walter, T., & Siebert, A. (1990). Student Success: How to Succeed in College and Still have Time for Your Friends (5th ed.). Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Incorporated.

Wilkie, C., & Kuckuck, S. (1989). A longitudinal study of the effects of a freshman seminar. Journal of The Freshman Year Experience, 1(1), 7-16.